

## Ephesians 2

Petite Anglaise is a weblog of an English woman living in France

- Under the pseudonym *Petite Anglaise*
- Which apparently is what French people call English women
- She wrote an online diary (a 'blog') that recently resulted in her dismissal
- From the office in which she worked
- Apparently, one of the things that makes her 'blog' more interesting
- Than the typical musings of a 30-something working Mum
- Is the very fact that she is an English woman living and working in Paris
- Something which attracts some 3,000 regular readers to her website

Like British visitors to the Costa del Sol and similar resorts in Spain

- It is possible to be abroad only to speak English, eat English food
- And give yourself the impression that you are in Blackpool
- On one of the rare days that the sun shines
- A Spanish person in that community would hardly think they were visiting England
- But the English person in that community has scarcely visited Spain

Some years ago I visited the US Embassy in London with an American friend

- Although we remained in London
- Once in the Embassy, somehow he was at home and I was the visitor
- It was a strange experience for me – perhaps noticing my bewilderment
- My friend remarked, "You're in America now"

I have enjoyed all my visits to other countries

- Especially when those visits have caused me to have close interactions with the locals
- I have visited France, Ireland and Israel as a tourist
- But I have lived among people in Germany, Switzerland, Norway and the USA
- I enjoyed it but there were times when I felt very English

Somehow I think the illustration that I want to offer could only be completed

- By my living in another country for a time (which I have done)
- And then visiting the British Embassy in that country (which I have not done)
- To show that though I was living in that country, my citizenship was elsewhere
- It is the tension between being in one place but belonging in another

I think my limited illustrations go some way to introducing this second chapter of Ephesians

- Paul is telling the Christians in Ephesus that they have a very different citizenship
- From the prevailing world around them – they still live in the same place
- But the contrasts are striking
- Living in transgressions and sins versus living in good works prepared by God
- This world versus the heavenly realms
- Death versus life
- Sinful nature versus union with Christ
- Wrath versus mercy and salvation
- Under the 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' versus 'seated in the heavenly realms'
- By nature children of wrath versus by love and grace God's workmanship

The first ten verses are really a summary of the Christian gospel

- The former way of life in sins (2:1-3)
- God's salvation in Christ (2:4-7)
- Salvation by grace through faith explained (2:8-10)
- Though for convenience I intend to leave the middle section until last

## I OUR PLIGHT – WITHOUT CHRIST

'You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live'

- What a crazy expression and one which it is difficult for us to take seriously
- How can you be both living and dead at the same time?

At first sight the Apostle Paul's description of our plight without Christ seems too harsh

- Surely not everyone is as degraded as he suggests
- Surely there is plenty of joy and happiness in the world
- Surely there are many good people in the world – this descriptions scarcely fits
- Surely these people are not 'objects' (literally 'children') of God's wrath?

Recently I had an unusual experience – at Reading station

- I got on a train at Reading that was terminating at Plymouth – but did not go there
- Janet and I had arranged to meet at Exeter – so at Exeter I got off
- But that does not alter the fact that the train was going to Plymouth
- And without getting off – that is where I was going to end up

In Ephesians 1, Paul talks about being predestined

- The relationship between God's choosing (election) and our freewill is complex
- And not something that I can tackle here – but the main point is plain enough
- There is a destination to which those who are 'in Christ' are heading
- Paul gets so carried away about this that he offers what amounts to a doxology
- He rejoices in the grace of God and the faith of the Ephesian Christians
- But in Chapter 2 he points to the stark contrast of life in Christ to death without him

A train journey in Germany caused me to have a little while to stand on a railway platform

- It was a sunny day and we were heading for the great cathedral city of Ulm
- Most of my previous train journeys in Germany had been from the south to the north
- But this one was from the west to the east
- Was it along these lines that cattle trucks clattered towards the death camps?

What a contrast between being made alive in Christ and being dead in trespasses and sins?

- Men and women do not need preachers to tell them this – but they seem not to see
- They are on the death train - and what they need to do is to get off

I quite like the London Underground but in seven years living in London and since

- I have sometimes made the mistake of getting on the wrong train
- When the train pulls into the next station and you realise your mistake
- There is no point in arguing about what happened in the past
- The most important thing is to get off quick or you'll soon be in Barnet not Morden

To me it is amazing that people can enjoy the ride to death so much

- Think of the brevity and meaninglessness of life apart from God
- Perhaps people still believe the devil's first great lie, 'You will not surely die'
- But take a reality check – one billion people are living in dire poverty
- War, rumours of war and fear of terrorism touch every part of the planet
- The problems of the developing world, famine, drought and disease
- Are superseded in the developed world by alcohol, drug abuse and suicide
- And let's be very clear – religion is not the answer – only Christ is the answer

We need not worry too much about the fine distinction between transgressions and sins

- The truth of the matter is that our sinful nature is shared by everyone
- All around is there is a spiritual deadness that is the characteristic of life without God
- The very best of all religious efforts show us unable to meet even our own aspirations
- It is a real and present death because our spirits are dead to God
- Living 'among them' (v. 3) means to live and act just like everyone else
- We may not think that such people (as we are or at least were) deserve God's wrath
- After all why should God be angry about sin? He is angry because he cares
- And who would want a God who was not angry about injustice and sin
- God cares, personally, but if we refuse his grace we can only deserve his wrath
- The choice is plain enough – people live in one of two spheres
- In Christ or in transgressions and sins – this is not a matter of geography
- But a matter of Lordship

## II OUR PARDON – THROUGH CHRIST

If part of the problem of understanding our plight without Christ was – can it be so bad?

- The challenge of understanding our pardon through Christ is – can it be so good?
- The description of life without Christ is bleak – but because of his love and mercy
- God intervened – not because we deserved his love and mercy
- But because he is that kind of God

We are all familiar with those advertising offers that seem too good to be true

- We wait to discover what the catch is and soon we will find out
- That what seemed to be an offer that was too good to be true is just that
- This is the problem that every preacher of the gospel has to face

There are undoubtedly some people who think that they are too good to need God's grace

- But I have a suspicion that those who really understand the gospel message
- Find it much harder to believe that God, knowing all about them, loves them still
- Perhaps you are someone who, for many reasons, finds it hard to love yourself
- It seems just too good to be true that God loves someone like you
- You might feel particularly sinful or you might just feel small and insignificant
- But the good news is that where wrath might have come love and mercy come instead
- The challenge is plain enough for all to see
- This is our plight – without Christ
- This is our pardon – through Christ
- The Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us – this is what the cross is about

The opening verses of this second chapter of the letter to the Ephesians

- Paint a picture of what we are really like – we are people carrying immense baggage
- From a life marked by doubt and disobedience, failure and fear
- When we consider it seriously, sin is not just a matter of the choices that we make
- It is about the whole sphere in which we live

Some years ago, I was alongside a family where one of the children had a drug problem

- It seems to me that if anything is a living death for a young person it is drug addiction
- The way that the family solved the problem was for the young person to move away
- To go a clinic that would deal with the problem and then move out of the community
- For fear that a return to the old community would lead to a return to the old ways

There is an undoubted parallel for a Christian – but one that cannot be solved in the same way

- The believer, who once was dead in trespasses and sins
- Following the ways of this world and of the rule of the kingdom of the air
- Has been raised up and seated in the heavenly realms
- That is just as death was the end product of the former life of sin
- So heaven and glory is the end product of the new life in Christ
- The problem is that for the time being the two kingdoms exist side by side
- The old order is reluctant to lose one of its citizens and life can be a battle

On the one hand it is easy to accommodate those who make excuses for their sin

- I am just made that way, I cannot help myself and a thousand other excuses
- But this is as great a folly as accepting the return of the recovering addict to drugs

On the other hand it is easy to condemn people out of hand – and limit the grace of God

- The kind of self-righteous judgmental attitude that has driven people away from God
- Rather than the gracious, loving attitude that would win them back to him
- That, to me, is what makes this a great song

Faithful one, so unchanging,  
Ageless one, you're my Rock of peace.  
Lord of all, I depend on you,  
I call out to you again and again.  
You are my rock in times of trouble.  
You lift me up when I fall down.  
All through the storm, your love is the anchor,  
My hope is in you alone.

Sometimes the choices are difficult, sometime the way is tough, sometimes we get it wrong

- But because of the death and resurrection of Jesus – we pass from death to life
- Because the one who has promised it is trustworthy
- We are as good as in possession of it now

Many have found evangelistic aids as the four laws or Admit, Believe, Confess, Do useful

- But in a commendable attempt to explain the Christian faith simply
- We must not lose sight of the fact that the Christian faith is not simplistic

Faith requires real thinking, real commitment and real change

- So often, Christian faith has been reduced to ‘believing in God’
- But what people need to hear and to see is
- Love shared by those who have received love from a loving God
- Grace shared by those who have received grace from a gracious God
- Life lived by those who have received life from the living God
- For the gospel does not end with our pardon through Christ it continues with:

### III OUR PRIVILEGE – IN CHRIST

There are three things which the Bible text says that God has done

- He made us alive with Christ
- He raised up with Christ
- And seated us with him in the heavenly realms

Unlike some people, the Apostle Paul does not separate Christ’s death and resurrection

- Most people will accept that Christ was a figure from history and that he died
- But people are at best agnostic about the resurrection
- But Paul is clear that without the resurrection there would be no salvation
- Because without the resurrection there is no decisive victory over death
- When believers believe in Christ there is a sense in which we participate
- In the twin event of his death and resurrection

It is difficult to express this in anyway that does not seem trivial but I’ll try the best I can

- As you know I am anything but an armchair football supporter
- Before we were married Janet thought she was an Arsenal fan
- She watched the results on a Saturday afternoon and if they had won she gave a smile
- And if they lost she said, “Oh! Well, never mind.”
- She had no idea of a home defeat being almost the end of the world
- Or of the elation that comes from a tremendous victory or a league promotion
- To be fair even the most enthusiastic fan neither saves a penalty nor scores a goal
- But the profound identification with the team means what *they* did, *we* did
- No doubt similar, perhaps more profound emotions, are known in wartime

Paul’s identification with Christ needs to be complete

- Because Christ is crucified, Paul says, ‘I am crucified with Christ’
- It means that he is so fully identified with Christ as to share that ‘in him’
- By the resurrection the one who is in Christ is also made alive in him
- The one who is in Christ is exalted to God’s right hand in him
- The one who is in Christ is seated in the heavenly realms in him
- This is the great privilege of the believer

Our privilege – in Christ – is dependent upon our being ‘in Christ’

- It is a matter of Lordship and of citizenship and this comes about by faith
- Faith is not simply a matter of believing but relying
- Relying on something or someone believed to be reliable
- The focus of all of this is not on how much faith I have
- But on how trustworthy God is

It is this faith that binds us to Jesus Christ so closely that what is true of him is true of us

- Salvation does not come from believing ideas or an emotional decision
- But of being bound to Christ – something we recall in the Covenant Service
- Faith is not simply believing in God or even affirming the teachings of Jesus
- Rather it is a life-changing bond that produces good deeds
- Faithfulness in Christian living is not an optional part of Christ

In Ephesians 2 we see our plight without Christ

- Dead in transgressions and sins
- Following the ways of the world and rule of the kingdom of the air
- By nature objects of wrath

In Ephesians 2 we see our pardon through Christ

- By grace you have been saved through faith
- Not from yourselves, it is the gift of God
- Not by works, so that no one can boast

In Ephesians 2 we see our privilege in Christ

- God made us alive with Christ
- God raised us up with Christ
- God seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ

All to show the incomparable riches of his grace

- Expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus